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From: The Prime Minister

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cc: David Manning

IRAQ

Three thoughts:

(1) In all my papers, I do not have a proper worked-out strategy on how we would do it. The US do not either, but before I go, I need to be able to provide them with a far more intelligent and detailed analysis of a game-plan. I will need a meeting on this with military folk.

(2) The persuasion job on this seems very tough. My own side are worried. Public opinion is fragile. International opinion – as I found at the EU – is pretty sceptical.

Yet from a centre-left perspective, the case should be obvious. Saddam's regime is a brutal, oppressive military dictatorship. He kills his opponents, has wrecked his country's economy and is a source of instability and danger in the region. I can understand a right-wing Tory opposed to 'nation-building' being opposed to it on grounds it hasn't any direct bearing on our national interest. But in fact a political philosophy that does care about other nations – eg Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone – and is prepared to change regimes on the merits, should be gung-ho on Saddam.

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So why isn't it? Because people believe we are only doing it to support the US; and they are only doing it to settle an old score. And the immediate WMD problems don't seem obviously worse than 3 years ago.

So we have to re-order our story and message. Increasingly, I think it should be about the nature of the regime. We do intervene - as per the Chicago speech. We have no inhibitions - where we reasonably can - about nation-building ie we must come to our conclusion on Saddam from our own position, not the US position.

(3) Oil prices. This is my big domestic worry. We must concert with the US to get action from others to push the price back down. Higher petrol prices really might put the public off.

THE PRIME MINISTER

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